Interspecies Communication

Newsletter

Summer 1987

The Beluga Peace Project

First Phase: Concept and Intention

May

IC is sending two representatives up to the Bering Strait area of Western Alaska in late June to commence a communication project with the beluga whales who inhabit the area. Our intent is quite ambitious—nothing less than the development of an acoustic interface between humans and belugas—*and* a project undertaken as a collaboration between U.S. and Soviet musicians and scientists; as well as the Eskimos who reside on both sides of the strait. Specifically:

1. The belugas, or white whales, are a gentle species, and their own language *seems* more akin to human speech than any other cetacean species. Because they are among the most gregarious and socially inquisitive of all cetaceans, and because much of their vocal patterning falls within the range of human hearing, the potential of establishing an interspecies relationship is quite high.

2. Any peaceful collaboration between Soviets and Americans seems a worthwhile venture at his time. The fact that the Bering Strait (the old land bridge between East and West) is our closest physical link, makes this area especially potent as a site for a cultural bridge. The development of a U.S./U.S.S.R., human/beluga, art/science relationship provides an especially provocative model for world peace in our time.

3. The careful promotion of this project—through film, print, and presentations—also provides a fresh impetus to educate the rest of the world about the beluga as well as the entire Bering Strait ecosystem. As in all of our projects, we shall transmit live music from a boat set up as a recording studio. The belugas will be able to come and go as they please, without any harassment whatsoever from the human end. And yet, despite the fact that the belugas are currently being hunted by native peoples, it is not our intent to prosyletize any "correct" relationship with the whales. Instead, we serve best by focusing our attention entirely on the human/beluga interface, thus permitting our example to generate a forum for discussion and change. IC thanks the Slifka Foundation, Patagonia, The Alaska Performing Artists for Peace, Christine Stevens, Marlowe Hotchkiss, Harry James, and the Nome Chamber of Commerce for various levels of assistance in this upcoming project. We have also received consulting help and endorsements from: Greenpeace, The Esalen Soviet/American Exchange, JLH Productions, and the Earthtrust Foundation.

Second Phase: Exploration Complete

July

Just returned from the Arctic, from an Alaska larger than any guide book could ever describe. The midnight sun is like a daily dose of twelve hours of jet lag; lying in bed listening to families cooking up a barbecue next door at one o'clock in the morning. In Nome, we found much local interest in our project, and intimations of several other Soviet/American "bridgings" also in the planning stage. Flying to an outlying Eskimo village located directly across from Siberia, a place still locked by the sea ice in late June, we were received quite cordially. One elder, a lifelong whale hunter, seemed keen to learn all we could tell him about the joy of communicating with various whale species via music. "I'd like to hear that," he answered, but then added, "You know, of course, that we still need to hunt the whales. For us, it's a matter of survival." When we gave him a copy of *Orcas Greatest Hits* he responded warmly, and assured us that he and his friends would give it a close listen. During our long flyover of the coast—250 miles of ice and water viewed at 500 feet elevation and 100 miles per hour—we glimpsed the cursory movements of many marine mammals, including the telltale white of beluga whales diving below us. Later, out on the enormity of the sea with a thirty year fishing veteran, we saw a few gray whales, a possible sei whale, a lot of seals and porpoise, but no belugas. Various scientific papers inform us that the nearby Siberian coast is a more likely June habitat. Likewise, local knowledge informs us that there is a one-week window during the ice breakup when the belugas are most likely to be encountered heading due north.

Ideally, we need to be in Siberia during the month of May. All the more reason to work with Soviet assistance.

We are committed to return to the Arctic next year. This coming fall crystallizes as a time of engaging Soviet contacts through the diplomatic channels that have already been activated on our behalf. If the Soviets are interested, and if we are able to access the Siberian coastline, we will return to the Bering Strait come spring. And, if not, we are still committed to working with beluga whales. However, in that case, we will head further north and east into Canada; to the delta of the MacKenzie River, where we've been told 10,000 belugas congregate by mid-July.

Human/Dolphin Community

The west coast of Mexico is home to many species of dolphins, some of whom reside just offshore throughout most of the year. IC's own program in the warm Mexican waters began in 1982 when we worked for much of a winter and a spring at the resort complex of Careyes. After four intensive months of establishing a routine of boating out into a bay to one spot every morning, and then transmitting live music into the water, the IC team coaxed a pod of six spotted dolphins to interact with us on a regular basis. This initial phase of the Human/Dolphin Community was sponsored by John and Toni Lilly's Human/Dolphin Foundation as well as the Costa Careyes Resort. The project was filmed by the Televisa TV network; the resulting documentary aired to 130 million Spanish speaking viewers.

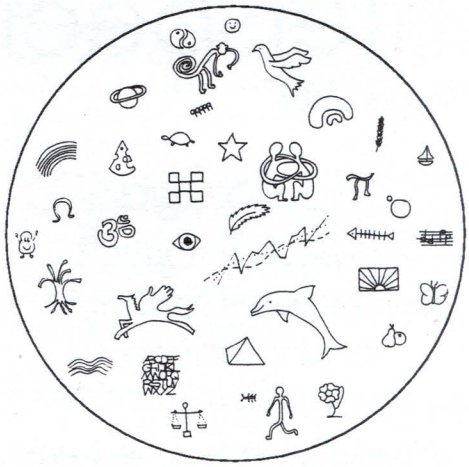
Since the project at Careyes ended, IC has sponsored similar interactive projects in the waters off the Hawaiian Islands, Lake Tyers, Australia, and the Bahamas. During the spring of 1986 we returned to Mexico for a two-week exploration of the Sea of Cortez along the Baja coast.

Recently, in April of 1987, we returned to Mexico once again; this time to Bahia Banderas just south of Puerto Vallarta. The Mexican/American community who live on a small bay sponsored IC to explore the feasibility of implementing a Human/Dolphin Community. Our intent was two fold: firstly, to observe the local dolphin activity over a period of two weeks; to identify both the species as well as the length of residency. Secondly, to meet with various people living in the town in order to better gauge the level of community support. It is essential that any project of this nature draws upon the participation of local people, so that the interspecies relationship may continue to grow in our own absence.

We saw dolphins nearly every morning of our stay. These were mostly bottlenose, with a smaller pod of porpoise (possibly the very rare *vaquita*). On one occasion we sighted a pod of large black dolphins, probably pseudorcas. It is possible as in Careyes, that during the winter months, pods of humpback whales migrate past the bay where their singing can be heard in all its glory.

Our trip to Banderas was a total success; so much so that IC now has plans to rent a house overlooking the bay for two months next winter. At that time, we shall commence an acoustic as well as a swimming relationship with the local pods of dolphins and whales. If any of our members would like to participate, please let us know. IC thanks Mela Leavell, Kyle Hence, Dean Fleming and Cynthia Darden for helping to orchestrate phase one of this project.

Drawing by Kim Straitiff



Drawing by Birgit Lehmann

The IC Computer

Our last newsletter included a solicitation for a computer system to help us better meet the challenge of this expanding organization. The response to that call was nothing short of overwhelming. Now, six months later, IC is up and running on its own system, and well along in the process of transferring many of its operational tasks onto disk. We would especially like to offer thanks to our corporate donors of software: Microsoft, The Software Group, Mouse Systems, and Norton, Inc.

The Next Step

We have an interest in expanding the IC newsletter into a quarterly journal because over the years we have gathered a growing file of unpublished quality stories, articles, and drawings from various individuals and taken all together, this media represents a unique voice needing to be made available to an interested public. Our newsletter format and size as it is now does not allow for the inclusion of this body of material.

In order to achieve the possibility of publishing a quarterly in-house, IC would need to expand its computer operation to a complete desktop publishing outfit. Therefore we would need a laser printer (with page description language), a high resolution monitor, and a few software packages, fonts and clip art. Again, we ask for help. Any donations of funds or of IBM compatible hardware or software would be much appreciated.

Will you Won't you Join the Dance

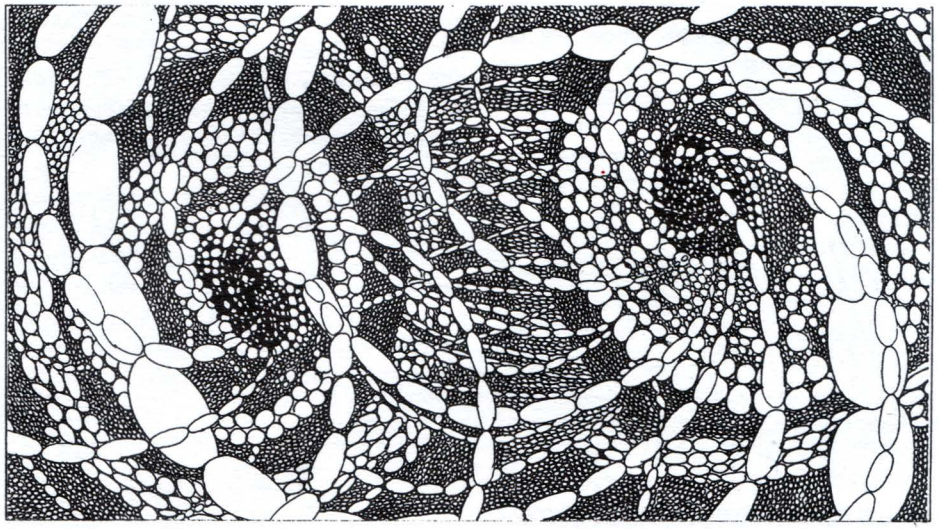
I planted three oriental poppy plants in three different locations last summer. The first of them grew under the sparse shade of a young plum tree, in rocky soil amidst close plantings of sweet william, canterbury bells, and montbreitias. It seemed fairly happy in its well-drained location all winter long, yet by midspring it actually appeared to shrink as the canterbury bells directly to the south shot up to four feet tall. The second poppy grew fifty feet line-of-sight away, directly across the flat mossy-covered rock which constitutes our front yard. Here, the conditions were quite different. This one spent the winter in a soil built up from an entire truckload of horse manure; raised above the bare rock in my own attempt to create a garden where a standing puddle of water had stood each winter. Unfortunately, my master plan worked only to a point because all the plantings spent most of this entire last winter standing in a puddle of icy water which reached just below the surface of the soil. Naturally, the irises flourished; while species including scabiosas and columbines suffered or even died. This, my second of three poppies, also seemed to flourish.

The third poppy was planted a hundred feet away, well out of sight of the other two; down a hill, at the edge of a fir forest, and in a rusty-colored soil made from a thousand years of well-rotted wood. To this soil I added several woodstove's worth of wood ashes, a goodly portion of manure, and then interplanted tree peonies, geums, and foxgloves amidst the single poppy. This plant shot up to full height by the time of the first frost of October, and then did little more throughout the mild winter.

By spring, plants one and three were about the same size. Plant two, growing in its super-rich puddle of water, was easily twice as big as the other two, with double the amount of flower buds. Then on May 20th, between 10 am and noon, the first papery-textured flowers from plants one and two opened as if, together, they had chosen one another as partners in a well-orchestrated, and magnificently scheduled samba. Literally, they bloomed as mirror-images of one another.

Now I sit on the moss, a captive audience to the dance, and sanction an entire brass band of large intellectual concepts to parade through my mind in an attempt to explain the riddle of the synchronized poppies. Finally I rise and walk down the hill to stare soberly at the third of the triumvirate. It stands reaching towards the sun as a virtual triplet to the others, but still an entire week away form joining them in the dance.

Explanations? We humans love them, build entire civilizations around them. But then, how dare I posture; without them I would never be permitted to stand here in my Pacific Northwest microclimate and gaze down upon these exquisitely silken,



apricot-colored imports from Asia. In a word, the only difference between poppies one and two on the one hand and poppy three on the other, is the fact that they have been in *view* of one another every day of their entire lives. The poetry of this observation implants itself deeply into my consciousness, undulating gracefully within the breeze of its own plausibility until, finally, it blossoms forth with the stature of personal truth. After all, how do any of us come to dance with one another, until first we place ourselves in an appropriate position (sometimes like a flower) or state of mind (sometimes like a human being) to share all of those synchronized sensations that spring from the wellspring of intimacy? Is that it, or have I turned it inside-out?

Actually, I feel as if I may have already lost my way. What to do but return to my original seat between the poppies. I plop down on the moss and gaze at first one and then the other. But something is amiss. Now it's my turn to join the dance. First I stand, walk backwards two steps, sit down again and turn my head towards first one and then towards the other poppy. I had been sitting directly between their line of sight.

Jim Nollman

IC Philosophy—
An Overview

Interspecies Communication, Inc (IC) was formed in 1978 to foster communication research between human beings and other species of animals. We have sponsored field projects with species as diverse as frogs, turkeys, whales, wolves, and howler monkeys. Our work has been the subject of many magazine and journal articles, at least two books, and TV documentaries filmed by ABC, NBC, PBS, Televisa (Latin America), and NTV (Japan). Over the years we have been supported by groups as varied as Greenpeace, The German Arts Council, The Smithsonian, and the Threshold Foundation.

Our methodology focuses an integration of the arts and sciences, with a strong emphasis placed upon environmental preservation. As such, IC serves as a bridge between several previously segregated fields of endeavor, representing a vital approach to the evolving relationship between human beings and the rest of nature. Direct communication with an animal through music or touch demonstrates a potent image of that creature as a dynamic participant—as an equal. The advancement of this relationship, either through the media or through direct experience, challenges all of us to rethink our ideas about animal consciousness and wisdom. The promotion of this concept remains our primary reason for existence.

Although our work is often the source of much scientific debate and scrutiny, and utilizes many of the well-tested methods of field zoology, it also involves techniques that are patently *nonscientific* and better described as artistic and shamanistic. The projects we sponsor go far beyond

the limits of straightforward data collecting and instead, function primarily as an expression of what it means for humans to re-establish their emotional and cultural ties with the natural world.

For just one example, the concept of a sacred area where humans and animals meet regularly to mutually explore the many-layered bridge of communication, is a very old one. It has its roots in the traditions of dozens of cultures—from the ancient Greeks at Delphi, to the Eskimos, and the modern day Australian Aborigines. So in our own work we establish a "sacred area," a communal site, for engaging the wild animals with whom we are conducting research. Concomitantly, we never chase after our animal collaborators but, instead, wait for them to approach in response to our own communication. Music has been our most successful attractant.

In practice, we learn the signs of communication directly from the animals. We recruit musicians and artists because they are the people within our own culture most capable of inventing and implementing new modes of communication. We involve anthropologists and indigenous peoples to teach us the traditional and spiritual significance of a particular species and environment. We engage people with psychic abilities to help us probe the largely untapped holographic capabilities of the animals. We encourage the input of zoologists who analyze our data, and so keep our work aligned with the constructs of scientific research. Lastly, we encourage the participation of families and children, who add an essential element to a field community involved in reconnoitering with other species who also exist in family units. Taken all together, these various elements help us discover ways to better serve the needs of the animals, humanity and the planet.

Chimp and the Drum

Many travellers and researchers of Africa's fauna who for the first time happened to be in virgin forests inhabited by all sorts of animals, frequently heard before the sunset a queer drum tatoo, the sounds of which echoed many miles away. Those who heard it thought that in those places there were villages, not marked on the map, which communicated between one another by means of tam tams. But guides from local tribes assured that those were . . . monkeys playing, to be more exact—chimpanzee.

These anthropoids are distinguished not only by their cleverness but also peculiar musical ear. Discovering a hollow tree trunk a chimp very often takes thick sticks and begins to tattoo with all its strength in front of other chimps who get together for an original concert before sleep.

Moscow News

Income and Membership

Our last newsletter included a card, calling for a direct response from our 4000 readers. We stated that changes in our finances, joined with a mailing list whose size had grown bulky beyond its own utility, necessitated a reconfirmation from those who genuinely wanted to maintain contact with our work and writing. The results were gratifying. Firstly, the mailing list now contains about a thousand names, which makes it much more tractable given our current resources. Secondly, we received contributions from a veritable flood of new members. And so, for the first time in its six years of existence, this issue of the IC newsletter will pay for itself directly from membership contributions. We feel that the directness of this approach serves to intensify the commitment between IC and you the reader, our supporter and friend.

Acknowledgements

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